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WHEN BRITAIN OFFERED PEACE

By Kiyoshi K. Kawakami

Grim January of 1942 saw the fall of Singapore, the Gibraltar of the Orient. Great Britain, it seemed, was faced with the imminent collapse of its Asiatic empire, the foundation upon which its power and wealth had rested since the fabulous accomplishments of Clive and Hastings in India.

To ward off this threatened disaster the British Foreign Minister, Anthony Eden, early in 1942 secretly approached Tokyo with a peace overture the essential features of which were as follows:

1. Japan to return Singapore and Malaya to Great Britain.
2. Great Britain to recognize Japan's preponderant position in North China, including, roughly, Jehol, Chahar, Hopei, Suiyuan and Shangtung provinces.
3. Great Britain to conciliate the United States and China for peace on the above terms.
4. Japan to propose an armistice at once, thus saving British and American face.

This is the most sensational of the disclosures to which the Japanese public has been treated since the Supreme Allied Commander abolished censorship and proclaimed freedom of speech and thought for Japan. The story is dramatically told in a new Japanese book, Shempu Nijunen, or Twenty Years of Whirlwind, written by a well-known and highly respected journalist, Shozo Mori, editorial executive of the Mainichi, formerly the influential and prosperous Osaka Mainichi.

While I have no personal knowledge of the events described, it is incredible that, if without foundation, circularization of these statements would have been permitted by the military authorities in Tokyo.

Had Japan reacted favorably to the British proposal, the course of world history in the past five years might have been vastly different. Fortunately for the Allies, and to Japan's eventual undoing, Premier General Hideki Tojo paid scant attention to it. He did not bother even to reject the proposal; he simply ignored it.

Drunk with power -- Tojo was then Prime Minister, War Minister, Home Minister and later made himself Chief of the General Staff and Minister of Munitions as well -- and blinded by the dazzling initial

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succession of his armies on all fronts, Tojo was dreaming of the glorious day when the Rising Sun should fly over India and Australia. His bemused mind had greater faith in Hitler and Mussolini than in Roosevelt and Churchill!

II

Lest the London proposal, if divulged, undermine the morale of both soldiers and civilians, Tojo kept it "top secret." Even within the Cabinet itself, only a few were allowed to know anything about it.

But news so overwhelmingly important has a way of leaking through even the most jealously guarded concealment. A politician of considerable influence, with friends among the high officials of the Army and Navy, got wind of the British proposal. He was Seigo Nakano, leader of the political group called Toho Kai (Eastern Society), with 47 members in the House of Representatives.

Nakano had been a fervent nationalist, and believed that Japan's vested rights in Manchuria and North China should be firmly held. But he was not a reckless expansionist. When he heard of the British peace offer he was for it heart and soul. So he lost no time in urging upon Premier Tojo the wisdom and necessity of terminating hostilities as soon as possible.

To Nakano, the overture from Churchill's government was a godsend. As he saw it, the longer the war lasted the weaker Japan's position would become. But Tojo turned a deaf ear to all such warnings. None could wake him from his dream of empire.

Then Nakano, with his followers, took to the platform. An orator of considerable magnetic power, he thus hoped to force Tojo's hand by rousing public sentiment for early peace, though of course without referring openly to the British offer.

Tojo met the challenge by invoking repressive laws which completely muzzled his critics. Further, the Premier dissolved the Diet and carried out a general election with a view to eliminating dissenting elements from the legislature. This resulted in the institution of a rubber-stamp House consisting mostly of acquiescent members who had each received from Tojo a gift of 5,000 yen of government money for election-campaign expenses.

Nakano and his political group refused to be bribed or intimidated. As a consequence, the election reduced their representatives in the House from 47 to 6, including the leader himself. Nakano, though an ardent nationalist, believed in parliamentary government and freedom of speech, and had been waging war against the militarist policy of suppression,

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and of substituting for political parties the Fascistic organization called Imperial Rule Assistance Association.

III

Caught in the toils of repressive laws, Nakano went "underground." He secretly canvassed senior statesmen -- Konoye, Okada, Yonai, Hirota among them -- as well as imperial princes, notably Princes Higashi-kuni, Takamatsu and Kaya. He found these personages in entire agreement with him on the question of peace. To all of them peace was an imperative matter, the more so as Japan had suffered serious setbacks at Midway, in the Coral Sea and at Guadalcanal in the summer of 1942. Yet Tojo was blind to the straws so ominously obvious in the wind.

Therefore, the first thing to be done was to oust Tojo. According to Twenty Years of Whirlwind, the plan secretly agreed upon among Nakano and his supporters was to organize a new Cabinet headed by Kazushige Ugaki, a retired general, who had long been anathema to the Army because he had carried out certain measures of military retrenchment in the mid-1920's. The program was that the new Cabinet should not only take the initiative for peace, but should also eliminate from office all reckless expansionists of Tojo's school. It was intended to force all Army officers from civilian government bureaus and from war-industry corporations.

That was in the fall of 1943. More than a year had been allowed to go by with no action taken on the British peace proposal. By then Japan had evacuated Guadalcanal; the United States had recaptured Attu and occupied Kiska; the Japanese positions everywhere had become defensive; the initiative had passed into American hands.

In the West, Montgomery had defeated Rommel at El Alamein; Anglo-American forces had landed in French North Africa; the Allied invasion of Italy had begun. No longer was it possible for Japan to obtain a peace as favorable as had been suggested by Anthony Eden. Now the Toyko Government must itself sue for peace and against great odds. That was the task for the Ugaki Cabinet which Nakano and his supporters had been striving to launch.

The difficult problem was how to dislodge Tojo, still firmly entrenched in power. Some of Nakano's more reckless followers suggested assassination, but Nakano would have none of it. He refused thus to degrade himself to the level of his antagonist, whose terrorism he had been fighting.

Then Prince Konoye proposed that the Emperor be asked to dismiss Tojo. This, too, Nakano ruled out. In a constitutional monarchy the Throne, he insisted, should not be dragged into politics. He believed

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in the soundness of English political principles. In his opinion the senior statesmen, Konoye himself included, were in no small measure responsible for placing so ruthless an adventurer as Tojo at the helm. They had been in a position to recommend to the Throne the appointment of a more reasonable man. Why hadn't they done so?

Always plain-speaking, Nakano minced no words in criticizing the senior statesmen to their faces. It was their duty, he insisted, to find a way to force Tojo out of power.

IV

Then, on October 25, 1943, Nakano was suddenly arrested by gendarmes. The Constitution guaranteed personal immunity of legislators while the Diet was in session, as it then was. But Tojo had no hesitation in violating the Supreme Law of the Land.

Nakano was subjected to an all-night inquisition of the Star Chamber variety, but was released the following day. That evening he dined and talked cheerfully with his family as though nothing untoward had happened or might happen. A few hours after dinner he retired to his study, which served as his sleeping chamber as well. And there he killed himself in the traditional fashion of the samurai of old.

So quietly was harakiri performed that none of the family, not even the three gendarmes who kept vigil in another room, had the slightest knowledge of what happened until the following morning when the maid found Nakano lifeless in a pool of his own blood.

Nakano had known that he would be seized again as soon as the Diet was closed, and that the gendarmes would then torture him to extort incriminating information. He was not a man to flinch from personal suffering. What worried him was anxiety lest, in the state of delirium into which he might fall in the course of repeated tortures, he might unconsciously mutter words of a nature to embarrass his supporters, especially the imperial princes. That, as his friends saw it, was why he killed himself.

Deprived of Nakano's dynamic leadership the senior statesmen relapsed into senile do-nothingism, and Tojo remained in office until the fall of Saipan in July, 1944. But the latter's forced resignation then only brought to power General Koiso, whose vision was no clearer than that of Tojo himself.

An English translation of Twenty Years of Whirlwind seems desirable.

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Not Merely Gossip *A Supplement to* Human Events VOL. III, NO. 40

By Felix Morley October 2, 1946

For years to come lawyers will discuss the technicalities of the Nuremberg trials, probably with decreasing assurance as to the quality of the law which was originated there. But the underlying reason for the fiasco of the performance is something other than abuse of jurisprudence. What happened at Nuremberg was simply that Time moved too fast for Men. The prosecution had no difficulty in building a devastating case against the Nazi leaders. It was not anticipated that Relativity would so quickly make so much of the indictment sound absurd.

Of course a part of the proceedings was from the outset of dubious equity. One might assume that the disintegrating explosions over Hiroshima and Nagasaki would have reverberated in the minds of the American prosecutors when they denounced Goering, et al. for "crimes against humanity." One could have expected the Russian judge to have recalled "the rape of Finland" -- for which his country was expelled from the League of Nations -- before he solemnly approved the ruling that, since the signing of the Kellogg Pact, all war has been illegal. But the ears of victors are frequently deaf to the still, small voice of conscience and the memories of victors have convenient blind spots. A basic purpose of the Nuremberg trials was to establish a procedure whereby the conqueror could establish his moral as well as his physical superiority to the conquered. To do that effectively it was necessary not only to put much on the record, but also to leave a great deal off.

It was not the fault of the judges that the formula went wrong, for they were certainly justified in assuming that the fiction of Allied unity would be preserved throughout the trials. When this fiction exploded, inevitably the proceedings degenerated into a tragic farce. Between November 20, 1945, when the trial began, and August 31, 1946, when it ended, the possibility of another war, among the victors, became -- and remains -- an unconcealable apprehension. Naturally, this made it difficult for the Nuremberg judges, patiently listening to five million words of testimony proving that people who start wars ought to be hung. For all that anyone on that Bench could tell, he might himself be in the dock at the next big war crimes trial, if he should rule as law that membership in the government of a defeated nation is itself a crime.

Possibly that explains why the International Military Tribunal decided to declare that both Cabinet and high military office in a government waging aggressive war are not of themselves capital offenses. General Staff officers in more than one of the United Nations must feel a lot easier in their daily work because of that decision. On the other hand, conviction of the Gestapo as a criminal organization is an important precedent. What is sauce for the Gestapo goose might, on another Nuremberg stove, seem very readily applicable to the N.K.V.D. gander.

There is no room for misplaced sympathy over any of the individuals condemned at Nuremberg. Certainly the testimony shows that each deserved his fate. But if the purpose of the proceedings was to discourage preparations for future war, one must conclude that the whole business has been an abysmal failure. What the trials have demonstrated is that a government planning war must henceforth be sure that it can utterly overwhelm its adversary. And that lesson is doing a good deal less than nothing to halt either the manufacture or the "improvement" of lethal weapons.

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It would be pleasant if we could all be as easily reassured as were some of the commentators by Stalin's recent interview in the Sunday Times of London.

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Mr. Raymond Swing, for instance, laid great stress on Stalin's statement that fragmentized Germany will not be utilized by the Soviet Union against the Western Powers; that the "demilitarization and democratization of Germany" are all the Kremlin wants. What Moscow means by democratization has been demonstrated throughout Eastern Europe, and the definition does not accord with that found in any American dictionary. As to demilitarization, Secretary Byrnes is still uninformed on why his proposed 25-year-pact for supervision of German disarmament was rejected. And Russia still refuses to permit co-operative inspection of German armament plants in all the zones of occupation.

Those familiar with Communist dialectic should note that Stalin specifically did not say that he sees no danger of war. What he did say was: "I do not believe in a real danger of a new [underscore inserted] war." The Soviet dictator has previously asserted that both World War I and World War II were caused by the dynamics of rapacious capitalism, and are historically not two wars but merely two acts in the drama of capitalist disintegration. If it should take a third act to complete the tragedy, Stalin's reputation for blunt honesty might still be maintained.

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Melancholy memories are aroused by Winston Churchill's recent assertion that Federal Union is the "sovereign remedy" for the ills of Europe.

It is now a little more than seventeen years since, on September 9, 1929, Foreign Minister Briand of France formally proposed such a union, under the sponsorship of the League of Nations. We have before us the French text of that original memorandum, with its pathetically prophetic conclusion: "This is the decisive hour, when thoughtful Europe may itself dispose of its own destiny. To unite in order to live and to prosper: such is the inescapable necessity which the Nations of Europe must henceforth confront."

Also in our files is Document A.46.1930.VII of the defunct League of Nations, being the text of the replies of 26 European Governments to the French memorandum on Continental Federation. But the Russian and Turkish Governments expressed no opinion in this compilation of September 15, 1930, for the simple reason that their opinion was not asked, Moscow and Ankara being then regarded as non-European capitals.

To study these replies is today an interesting historical exercise. It is ironic that the attitude of the British Government was then distinctly non-committal. "Protracted consideration," it emphasized, must be given before taking action on such a far-reaching project. On the other hand the German Government, in those pre-Nazi days, was enthusiastic in behalf of a continental approach to Continental problems, and wisely insisted that both Russia and Turkey, though not then Members of the League of Nations, should be invited to sit in on all the discussions.

If those discussions had been held, what Mr. Churchill now prescribes as the "sovereign remedy" might have been accepted as such in time. Today one can scarcely blame the Russians, excluded from the original consideration, for believing that a much more sovereign remedy is the federation of Europe as a union of Soviet States, subordinate and subservient to Moscow. To such a union Washington cannot be as apathetic as it was to the Briand Plan.

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Great Britain, hard-pressed for foreign exchange with which to buy vital foodstuffs and raw materials, is making a vigorous drive for Latin-American trade. The negotiations with the hard-boiled Perón administration in Argentina have received more publicity than the British-Brazilian conversations.

A far-reaching commercial treaty between these countries seems to have been prepared by the recent exchange of letters between Foreign Minister Bevin and Neves

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da Fontoura, his Brazilian counterpart. In exchange for Brazilian hides, timber and coffee the British will provide agricultural machinery and railroad equipment, as well as the transportation for these manufactures.

The shift in the relative economic strength of European and South American countries is indicated by the fact that Brazil now has a sterling balance of some £50 million, arising from British wartime purchases. The change is further emphasized by the agreement that Brazil will provide rehabilitation loans to British-owned utilities in the former country. When Brazil finances Britain the event would seem to fall in the traditional definition of news -- not dog bites man, but the reverse.

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The drive for Latin-American markets calls attention to Britain's remarkable recovery in export trade. In July, the last month for which complete figures are available, these reached 120 per cent of the 1938 monthly average, no small accomplishment for a nation which in July was less than a year from the close of its most exhausting war. The British goal, however, is an export level 175 per cent of the 1938 average. That high figure, it is estimated, is the minimum necessary to rebuild the shattered national income of pre-war days.

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A scant month before the Congressional elections, Republican prospects look excellent. Seldom has the Opposition Party been able to count so many unexpected advantages at the psychological moment. Already many a dopester is "proving" that only a 5 per cent shift in key constituencies is needed to insure an easily Republican House and that the outcome, to quote a famous Farleyism, is "in the bag."

But bags are sometimes less expansive than the hopes which are crowded into them. At least one Republican sage discounts the 5 per cent argument, saying that figure is now as speculative in politics as in railroad bonds. He gloomily predicts that the shoals of voters deserting Mr. Truman will be offset by other shoals -- of Federal jobholders and their relatives -- who will rally en masse from fear that a Republican Congress would actually curtail embattled bureaucracy. "One 5 per cent will cancel the other," says this G.O.P. Cassandra.

Time will soon tell. But the viewpoint does indicate the effect of a pyramiding bureaucracy on that party system which is basic to a healthy democracy, if not to a healthy Democratic Party.

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Entitled "Friendly Rivalry," the lead article in the September 25 issue of the U.S.S.R. Information Bulletin, published by the Russian Embassy in Washington, discusses the recent Russian-American chess tournament in Moscow. But the casual reader might examine the following two paragraphs without realizing that the discussion only concerns a game.

"The second USSR-USA chess match is now in the records. After sustaining defeat at the hands of the Soviet team in the radio match a year ago, the American team made a strong comeback in their return match, giving the Soviet team the stiffest opposition it has yet faced.

"By their strong play the American players won the respect of their opponents and of the vast audience of Soviet chess fans who followed the game avidly, move by move. The friendly rivalry between the two teams is by no means at an end."

Chess is traditionally the game of statesmen. No metaphor is more overworked than "the chessboard of politics." Quite possibly "strong play" by Mr. Byrnes at Paris is also "giving the Soviet team the stiffest opposition it has yet faced," and thereby winning that "respect" which the realistic Russians have never accorded to the pusillanimous.

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Notes and Quotes

The parody has long been an effective literary form. But it has seldom been used more effectively than in "A Legend of UNO," being a take-off on the famous Ingoldsby Legends, in the current issue of Politics. Incidentally, that monthly magazine, published at 45 Astor Place, New York 3, resembles HUMAN EVENTS in deserving to be better known, if for no other reason. "A Legend of UNO," by the English doctor-poet Alex Comfort, is too long to quote in toto. But its flavor can be tasted in the opening lines:

"The President sat in the President's Chair --
Playboy and Commissar, all were there:
Every Statesman, every Tycoon,
And Britain's Upholder, Sir Peto Colquhoun,
Mr. Muddington Maughan, which the toffs pronounce Moon,
Together with every type of buffoon
Everyone bad And everyone mad
Who'd foregathered to see what there was to be had,
Cheered like the Devil, and joined in the revel
(Excepting for Franco, since he was in Seville
But he dropped them a card, as he used to to Neville
That he could not take part in the business afoot,
But he'd take the occasion to send them some fruit)."

* * * * *

Fireside Press, Inc., is a new publishing house, located at 604 S. Washington Square, Philadelphia 6, which is apparently willing to brave the wrath of the embattled fellow travellers.

At least that is the impression given by the first book we have seen with the Fireside Press imprimatur: "Behind the Iron Curtain," by George Moorad, to whose CBS broadcasting we have in the past listened with interest. Mr. Moorad was himself behind the iron curtain, in Moscow and elsewhere, during the last months of the war, and his observations are the more interesting -- and important -- because told in a simple, factual, straightforward and objective manner. Indeed, that approach is what makes this plain tale of censorship and tyranny something which the one-way Council of American-Soviet Friendship will find it difficult to brush off.

* * * * *

One line in "Behind the Iron Curtain" roused our particular curiosity. Mr. Moorad observes that the Russians "are acquiring an appetite for detective stories." Perhaps this pathetic weakness accounts for the vitriolic attack on good old Sherlock Holmes in a recent issue of the Moscow Evening News. As quoted in the New York Times, the Russian critic, one Chernov, finds that the Sherlock Holmes stories "poison the mind of readers" by propagating a "criminal romanticism" injurious to clear Marxist thinking. The famous Baker Street Irregulars, devoted to furthering the cult of Holmes and Watson, will have to accept this challenge. Even Henry Wallace must see that there are some limits to the policy of appeasement.

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That fine old word "Democracy" has been kicked around the gutter almost as much as "Liberal" in recent years. Herewith a current illustration, from the hard-working Reporter on American-Soviet Relations. Those relations, in fellow traveller opinion, should be complete subordination of American principles to those now dominant in Russia. Thus: "Democracy must be defined in terms of what it means for Germany, in the light of German history; German democracy obviously cannot be patterned after ours, or include the same relationship of different classes." That word "ours" deserves at least a minute's thoughtful reflection.

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